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3 December 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: C/PRD  
DC/PRD

SUBJECT: Review of Current Intelligence on USSR/Eastern Europe,  
November

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1. Of [redacted] articles in the NID, NIB, and DIN on this area, I judged half as either worth reporting (67) or of major value (7), and about a quarter as having a significant relationship to a KIQ. Both percentages are higher than I anticipated. I found fewer filler or marginal utility items than I expected, and fewer items based primarily on open sources.

2. Among particular strong points I rank first the NID series on the nationalities in the USSR. The in-depth analysis was illuminated by details not readily available elsewhere. The 19 November installment on the relationships between national sentiments and economic problems was perhaps the best in the series. Moreover the series introduced a new and promising feature to the NID format, the insert--in this case an unclassified map of the Soviet republics with statistical data on major ethnic groups.

3. Another strong point was the coverage of Soviet economic policy toward the West, the subject [redacted] Of the 9 NID articles (3 of which were also carried in the NIB) I gave 1 article a maximum rating in terms of value and relationship to a KIQ ("Soviets Increasing Purchases of Western Plants, Equipment," 9 November). It can be objected that the level of detail in these articles might be insufficient to satisfy an economist. Even so, the articles seem worthwhile in political terms. They add an important dimension to our understanding of the USSR's status as a great power. They suggest a USSR in a stronger position overall than someone who had not read them would imagine.

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4. A third strong point was an item in the DIN, later published with some editing in the NIB, which definitely seemed tailored to a KIQ. It dealt with the political impact of Soviet port calls in the Third World, [redacted] I gave this article a maximum rating as well. I suspect some readers even at the national level might now be curious about what actually occurs during these port calls. If so, perhaps FSO or DAO collectors could make an input to future articles on the subject.

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5. Among the less favorable results was a statement in a 12 November NID article ("Nationalist Tendencies Growing Among Russians in the Soviet Union"--part of the outstanding series mentioned in paragraph 2) which incorrectly attributed to exiled author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn opposition to independence for the Ukrainian and Belorussian republics. We have informally requested the NID editor to make a correction.

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6. Meanwhile there may be a more general lesson in this episode (which in itself is not very serious). Some weeks earlier, the same branch in OCI published an article in the same publication which avoided the mistake made later. In other words the correct version was at least partly forgotten over time, the good work partly undone. It should be recognized that this sort of thing can happen from time to time, especially on subjects in which the data are not easily aggregated. In its own way it underscores the difficulty a reader must have in absorbing the finer points of several current intelligence items on the same subject. The whole can sometimes be less than the sum of the parts.

7. Another lowlight of the month was the tendency (also noted in October) to give single news events multiple coverage. This might have been justified for the Brezhnev trip to Vladivostok, given the inherent importance of the Summit Conference, but surely not for the Revolution Anniversary celebration in Moscow or the Romanian Party Congress. I question the need to tell the reader: the event is about to happen; the event is happening; the event has indeed happened. Moreover I see some risk that this fragmentary style of reporting may at times obscure the more interesting aspects of the events. For instance, neither the 7 November nor 9 November NID article on the Red Square parade mentioned the unexpected cancellation of the civilian portion of the parade. The 9 November NIB article did mention it, but the relevant passage was deleted from the NID, presumably to save space.

8. A third type of dubious achievement was the tendency to dramatize the banal and underplay the interesting. Consider, for instance, the 7 November NID article headlined: "Foreign Policy is Highlighted by Gromyko." What else would anyone expect the Soviet Foreign Minister to "highlight"? On the other hand, consider the articles in the 15 November NID and NIB on the appointment of Demichev as Soviet Minister of Culture. Both describe him as having been a "neutral" influence in cultural affairs. Yet the view of analysts in OCI and elsewhere in CIA (FBIS notably) is that Demichev has been a "benign" influence. If the latter description had been accepted--or if a difference of opinion about him in the Community had been highlighted--the appointment would have been seen as a much more interesting development.

9. Generally I found the NID well ahead of the NIB and DIN in quality and attractiveness. The NIB is redundant to a NID reader and yet cannot offer in-depth series of articles regularly carried in the NID. Substantively the DIN has improved since October, particularly on Soviet activities in the Third World, but I still regard it unsatisfactory in that regard. For the DIN style I offer the 25 November item on the Soviet gift of a ship to the Sri Lanka Navy. The analyst explained that it could only mean the Soviets were trying to "establish naval inroads in the country."

Attachment

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